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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the decisions, benefits, and difficulties in teaching educational psychology through a constructivist case study approach. Recent interest in and inquiry into constructivism, pedagogical content knowledge, and case study methodology are influencing the content and goals of educational psychology in teacher preparation. The content of educational psychology lends itself to authentic, active, and pragmatic applications of theory to school practices as well as to investigations of a variety of educational issues, perspectives, and contexts which can be viewed through case study, a constructivist problem-based approach to learning. Things to consider when organizing for case-based instruction include course content and setting, students, case sources, case selection, teaching strategies and assignments, and assessment. An important step in organizing for case-based teaching is having a conceptual framework to organize and facilitate case analysis, discussion, and assessment. A five-step framework involves: identifying issues and facts in a case; considering different perspectives in a case; identifying professional knowledge; projections that might be taken; and considering likely consequences of particular actions. Case instructors must decide the kinds of assessment measures needed to match their desired outcomes. (Contains 16 references.) (SM)

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Case Study Considerations for Teaching Educational Psychology

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Case Study Considerations for Teaching Educational Psychology

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Recent interest and inquiry into constructivism, pedagogical content knowledge, and case study methodology are influencing the content and goals of educational psychology in teacher preparation. The reasons seem clear: The content of educational psychology lends itself to authentic, active, and pragmatic applications of theory to school practices, as well as to investigations of a variety of educational issues, perspectives, and contexts which can be viewed through case study, a constructivist problem-based approach to learning.

Widely-used educational psychology texts are including constructivism as a cognitive alternative to behaviorist and information processing views of teaching and learning. Concurrently, case studies are being integrated in educational psychology texts, and a myriad of case texts have appeared with application to educational psychology courses. This presentation will touch briefly on the decisions, benefits, and difficulties in teaching educational psychology through a constructivist case study approach.

Whether one embraces the case study method or not, teacher educators and preservice teachers have a more immediate issue to address regarding cases. Cases are now being used by the Educational Testing Service on their national teacher certification *Praxis II* "Principles of Teaching and Learning" exam to assess preservice teachers' professional pedagogical knowledge for certification. This content falls into our area of teaching and expertise as educational psychologists.

Lack of exposure to case studies, thinking through a variety of problems and issues, and selecting appropriate courses of action, may prove to be problematic for some preservice teachers on the *Praxis II* assessment. Preservice teachers need to be exposed to these kinds of problem solving, learning, and instruction strategies. Educational psychology professors also need to be familiar with case-based pedagogy and teaching strategies to stay current with constructivist teaching and certification assessment strategies.

A Checklist for Teaching with Cases

There are many things to consider when organizing for case-based instruction: course content and setting, students, case sources, case selection, teaching strategies and assignments, and assessment (see, Table 1).

Table 1: A Checklist for Teaching with Cases

- Course content and setting considerations

  Course organization
  Course content
  Course goals and objectives
  Length of course
  Time and space considerations
  Field experience or lab requirements

- Student considerations

  Preservice
  Graduate
  Inservice
  Novice or experienced
  Traditional or nontraditional
  Undergraduate, teachers, administrators, or support staff

- Case sources

  Case study texts
  Instructor-written cases
  Student-written cases
  Classroom-teacher written cases
  Cases included in content-area text books
  Short stories, novels, films, and media as cases
  Cases on the Internet and World Wide Web

- Case selection

  Format of cases- text, film, video, audio, multimedia
  Generic or content-specific
  Context and complexity
  One issue or multilayered
  Length of cases
  Number of cases
  Purpose of cases

- Teaching strategies and assignments

  Case assignments- individual, small group, whole class
  Kinds of case assignments
  When to assign cases
  The importance of a conceptual framework
  Strategies for case analysis
  Strategies for case discussion
  Integrating cases into the curriculum

- Assessment issues

  Criteria for grading cases
  Kinds of assessment measures
  Individual or group grades
  Instructor and/or peer review
  Format- oral, written, multimedia, Internet, Web
  Access and familiarity with the literature

For a full discussion of each of these considerations, see Sudzina (1999a).

A Conceptual Framework for Analyzing Cases

An important step in organizing for case-based teaching is have a set of unifying ideas, or conceptual framework, to organize and facilitate case analysis, discussion, and assessment. I use the conceptual framework from McNergney, Herbert & Ford (1994) that can be applied across content areas, educational issues, and levels of instruction. The five steps include: (1) identifying the issues and facts in a case; (2) considering the different perspective in a case; (3) identifying professional knowledge; (4) projecting actions that might be taken; and, (5) considering likely consequences, both positive and negative, of particular actions. The following suggestions were adapted from Sudzina (1999b):

1. *Identifying the issues and facts in a case.* I ask the students to brainstorm among themselves and to list all the issues they can identify. I also ask them to examine and list all the facts in the case and then to decide which facts are relevant, as well as irrelevant, to the case. Then they must decide among themselves, which are the most important issues, and of those, which need immediate attention and which might be resolved at a later date. Regarding those issues requiring immediate attention, students must decide if they would be willing and able to take action.

2. *Identifying perspectives and values.* Roles plays can be very effective in helping students to recognize multiple points of view in a case. Many undergraduates initially tend to identify, and feel comfortable, with perspectives of the student or the teacher in a case. They also tend to view situations in a very black or white manner and to see what is wrong, rather than what is right, in a situation. When students take the roles of nontraditional students, parents, or principals, they can often "hear" how the dialogue unfolds, and imagine the motivations, values, and perspectives behind the words of each of the players in the situation. This helps move students from judgmental to a more compassionate and balanced interpretation of the facts and issues in a case.

3. *Identifying professional knowledge.* After identifying the case issues and perspectives, I encourage students to review the literature relevant to the case. Left to their own devices, most students tend to shoot from the hip, or limit themselves to the resources at hand. I want them to stretch themselves and t explores the extent knowledge on various issues with cases. I require an online review of the literature, using ERIC on the Internet or one of the Netscape search engine such as Infosearch, Altavista, or Yahoo. I caution students not to accept everything they read at face value but to weigh the evidence in light of sources, their own experiences, their peers' and others' expertise, and the circumstances of the case.

4. *Formulating actions.* Projected actions need to be realistic; that is, actions that students would be capable of undertaking as the teacher in the case. Again, role play can be a catalyst in helping students to see and hear how their proposed actions might be received by the other participants in a case. I often demonstrate how the style and phrasing of one's speech can be just as important as its substance. The reverse is also true—the "correct" words can be said, but if they are said insincerely or without conviction the result can be a loss of credibility and capacity to affect change. Language, communication skills, and nonverbal behavior all need to be considered in terms of their effects on the choices of action, interpretation of such actions by others, and probable outcomes.

5. *Considering the consequences of actions.* I emphasize that even the most carefully reasoned actions may not have the desired consequences because of factors beyond the control of the teacher. In addition to offering their best solutions, students need to recognize that for every actions there is always a "best case" and "worse case" scenario. The actual result may well lie somewhere in between—and might satisfy all involved. I encourage students to formulate contingency plans for a variety of responses in the case. What may seem obvious to one person may be totally overlooked by another. I caution students not to assume anything,

but to clearly communicate and articulate the reasons for their particular choices and actions.

Assessment Issues

Case instructors need to decide the kinds of assessment measures needed to match their desired outcomes- a ranking, a rating, a formative or summative written or oral evaluation, and/or grades. Do you want to give individual or group grades, or both? Will your grades take into account instructor and/or peer review? There are many exciting possibilities. But any way you choose to assess cases, it is not easy, and it is time consuming. But to echo many of our colleagues who teach with cases, it is worth the extra time and effort.

In my own classes, I often use evaluation criteria based on the five categories previously suggested as a conceptual framework for case analysis. A Likert scale, with scoring categories ranking from excellent to poor, was constructed for each item and distributed in class. I also add an additional item to assess case presentation skills. After each case presentation, the appropriate space was checked off by students and myself and scores tallied for each item. We then have the opportunity to discuss where we see things alike and differently. This approach has been effective in guiding preservice teachers to think critically about what constitutes excellent case analysis and to focus on how to communicate that information to others. I also use a similar rubric (see, Table 2) with graduate students to assess case competition outcomes on-line (McNergney, Herbert & Kilbane, 2000).

Summary

The primary resource for how and what we teach in educational psychology has been educational psychology texts. Two major innovations in the last ten years in teacher education and research strategies have been: (1) case-based teaching, and (2) the use of the Internet to access resources and information. These innovations have found their way into the most widely used current educational psychology texts.

Case studies have long been used in the fields in medicine, law, and business to promote excellence in students' thinking, research, and problem-solving abilities. Current research indicates that incorporating cases in teacher preparation and professional development programs can have similar positive effects. Although it has been difficult to measure the longitudinal impact of exposure to case studies on the teaching profession, there is general consensus that the case study method offers a "value added" dimension to teacher preparation that lecture can not provide. This problem-solving dimension is increasing being integrated into the teaching, learning, and assessment of educational psychology procedures and practices.

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Table 2.

Rubric for Scoring Case Analyses

Cases illustrate multiple problems that occur sometimes simultaneously in educational settings. Good professionals recognize competing issues and determine which problem(s) to address first.

1.1

- This analysis demonstrates recognition of more than one problem in the case (2 points)
- This analysis recognizes only one problem in the case. (1 point)
- This analysis does not recognize any problems. (0 point)

1.2

- This analysis indicates that some issues are of more importance than others and explains why. (2 points)
- This analysis demonstrates that some issues are of more importance than others but does not explain why (1 point)
- This analysis does not demonstrate recognition that one issue might be more important than others nor does it explain why. (0 points)

1.3

- The problems recognized are based on facts in the case. (1 point)
- The problems recognizes are not based on facts in the case.(0 points)

1.4

- The analysis addresses one or more important problems. (2 points)
- The analysis addresses one or more problems that are of less importance. (1 point)
- The analysis does not address any problems. (0 points)

Comments

Recognizing the unique perspectives held by individuals involved in a case can help problem solvers develop a better understanding of problems and propose appropriate actions for addressing these problems. To appreciate the perspectives of individuals in the case it is useful to consider 1) their beliefs and values, 2) their feelings or emotions, and 3) knowledge they have about the situation.

2.1

- The analysis recognizes the perspectives of at least two characters in the case. (2 points)
- This analysis recognizes the perspective of only one character in the case. (1 point)
- This analysis does not recognize the perspectives of any characters in the case. (0 points)

2.2

Knowledge of the situation **Feelings** **Values**

The analysis considers all three of the attributes above for at least one of the perspectives. (3 points)

The analysis considers two of these attributes for at least one of the perspectives. (2 points)

The analysis considers one of the three attributes for the perspectives. (1 point)

The analysis considers none of these three. (0 points)

2.3

The perspectives addressed relate directly to the problem(s) on which the analysis focuses. (1 point)

The perspectives addressed do not relate directly to the problem(s) on which the analysis focuses.(0 points)

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Comments

This portion of the rubric determines how well problem solvers have used information from the case, their personal experiences and educational theory and research. It also checks whether the problem solver has considered what more they might need to know to understand the problems in the case.

3.1

- The analysis raises at least one question about information that might be missing or ambiguous. (1 point)
- The analysis does not demonstrate the problem solver's recognition that more information might be needed to analyze the case - no questions are asked about missing information. (0 points)

3.2

- This analysis applies knowledge from personal experience to identify problems or formulate actions. (1 point)
- This analysis does not apply knowledge from personal experience to identify problems or formulate actions. (0 points)

3.3

- This analysis applies knowledge from theory or research to identify problems or formulate actions. (1 points)
- This analysis does apply knowledge from theory or research to identify problems or formulate actions.(0 point)

3.4

- The analysis uses facts from the case to identify problems or formulate actions. (1 point)
- The analysis does not use facts from the case to identify problems or formulate actions. (0 points)

3.5

- The analysis uses facts from ancillary materials to identify problems or formulate actions. (1 points)
- The analysis does not use facts from ancillary materials to identify problems or formulate actions. (0 point)

3.6

- The knowledge the analysis includes is related to the problems identified as most important. (1 point)
- The knowledge included in the analysis is not related to the problems identified as most important. (0 points)

Comments

This portion of the rubric measures the utility and feasibility of actions proposed in an analysis.

4.1

- More than one action is proposed. (2 points)

One action is proposed. (1 point)

No actions are proposed. (0 points)

4.2

The analysis proposes actions that seem useful. (1 points)

The analysis proposes actions that do not seem useful. (0 points)

4.3

The analysis suggests at least one feasible, short-term action. (1 point)

The analysis includes no feasible, short-term actions. (0 points)

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4.4

- The analysis suggests at least one feasible, long-term action. (1 point)
- The analysis includes no feasible, long-term actions. (0 points)

4.5

- The actions proposed deal with the problems deemed most important by the writer. (1 point)
- The actions proposed do not deal with the problems deemed most important by the writer. (0 points)

Comments

This portion of the rubric determines whether a problem solver has considered both positive and negative consequences for the actions they propose.

5.1

- The analysis mentions positive consequences for the actions the analysis suggests. (1 point)
- The analysis does not mention positive consequences for the actions the analysis suggests. (0 points)

5.2

- The analysis mentions negative consequences for actions the analysis suggests. (1 point)
- The analysis does not mention negative consequences for actions the analysis suggests. (0 points)

5.3

- The consequences suggested are tied to the issues deemed of most importance by the writer. (1 point)
- The consequences suggested are not linked to the issues deemed most important by the writer. (0 points)

Comments

6.1

- The paper is well written; that is, it has no misspellings or obvious grammatical errors. (1 point)
- The paper is not well written; that is, it has either misspellings or obvious grammatical errors. (0 points)

6.2

- The paper is coherent; that is, ideas are integrated. (1 point)
- The paper is not coherent; ideas are not integrated. (0 points)

On a scale of 1 to 5, overall, how would you rate this analysis.

(1, Poor) (2, Fair) (3, Good) (4, Excellent) (5, Superior)

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